

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 15, 2018

Agenda Item: Turkey and Upland Game Bird Regulations and Quotas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

Background: Season structures and hunting district boundaries are adopted biennially for most game species every other year between with final adoptions in February. FWP proposes adopting the existing (2017) structures except for specific changes. Changes from December proposals are highlighted.

FWP proposes the following changes to turkey regulations:

- Make crossbows legal during the fall turkey season.
- Regions 2 and 3 to go to a general turkey license opportunity
- Region 2 Increase the per hunter number of the 299-01 female or beardless OTC fall licenses valid in Missoula and Ravalli Counties from 1 to 4
 - Introduce a 299-02 female or beardless OTC fall license valid in Missoula, Ravalli and Mineral Counties, one per hunter.

There are no changes proposed to upland bird. Final Commission action on webless migratory birds and waterfowl that were proposed in December will occur in April to allow for consideration of the final federal frameworks that come out in March.

The use of crossbows for fall turkeys would make regulations consistent with those for forest grouse where rifles, handguns and crossbows are legal. Spring turkey means of taking would not change.

Turkey populations in Regions 2 and 3 are doing well; they are robust, broadly distributed and productive. Currently, Missoula and Ravalli Counties in Region 2 are general license opportunities. This proposal would make it so for the rest of Region 2 and all of Region 3. The overall proposal would create more and equitable opportunity for turkey hunting in areas where turkey populations are thriving. It would also give landowners additional means to address problems with too many turkeys on their property, something we have heard more of, especially in parts of Region 3.

Except for calendar rotation, all other aspects for turkey and upland birds regulations are to remain unchanged from the 2017 regulations.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The crossbow proposal came to FWP from an interested public. Public comment ran from Dec. 7 through Jan. 24, and we received 57 comments on turkeys and 6 on upland game birds. Most comments on turkey did not want crossbows to be legal during any archery-only season. It should be noted that Montana regulations specifically state that crossbows are not legal archery equipment. A few of the sage grouse-specific comments spoke to wanting a special tag and a later season.

Alternatives and Analysis: No alternatives were analyzed.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the changes to the turkey regulations and no changes to upland birds as presented by FWP.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the changes to the turkey regulations and no changes to upland birds as presented by FWP. All other aspects of these seasons are to remain unchanged.